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**THE
COMPARATIVE-
HISTORICAL
METHOD OF THE
ZAGREB SCHOOL
OF LITERARY
STUDIES**

213-229

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::POVZETEK

VPOGLED V ZAČETEK IN potek razvoja Zagrebske šole za literarne študije nam omogoča pregled sistematizacije in harmonizacije akademskih literarnih študij na Univerzi v Zagrebu v skladu z načeli znanstvenih literarnih študij ("Literaturwissenschaft"), z ozirom na posebnosti in okvire evropskih filologij (nemške, romanske, slovanske in hrvaške) in kot sestavni del študija primerjalne književnosti. Osnova zagrebske šole je sklop teoretskih instrumentov, prevzetih od ruskega formalizma, osredotočanje na literarno besedilo in njegove notranje zakonitosti kot tudi odmik od impresionističnega kritičnega aparata, pozitivističnega biografizma in naštevanja literarno-historičnih dejstev, ki niso neposredno povezana z literarnim besedilom. Zagrebska šola se osredotoča na literarno besedilo kot izhodišče literarnega študijskega pristopa, ki je rezultat potrebe po akademski in metodološki neodvisnosti hrvaških znanstveno literarnih študij kot akademske discipline, kar je na začetku petdesetih let 20. stoletja prvič prispevalo k izmenjavi uvidov s širšimi evropskimi znanstveno literarnimi krogi.

Ključne besede: imanentizem, interpretacija, filologija, literarno zgodovinarstvo, Zagrebska šola za literarne študije

ABSTRACT**THE COMPARATIVE-HISTORICAL METHOD OF THE ZAGREB SCHOOL OF LITERARY STUDY**

An insight into the beginning and course of development of the Zagreb School of Literary Study is given by an overview of the systematization and harmonization of academic literary studies at the University of Zagreb with the principles of scientific literary study ("Literaturwissenschaft") and in respect of the peculiarities and frameworks of European philologies (Germanic, Romanic, Slavic and the national one, Croatian) and as part of comparative literature studies. What lies at the foundations of the Zagreb School are a set of theoretical instruments adopted from Russian formalism, focus on the literary text and its inner laws as well as a breakaway from the impressionistic critical apparatus, positivist biographism and enumeration of literary historical facts which are not directly connected to the literary text. The Zagreb School set focus on the literary text as a starting point of the literary study approach, which was a result of the need for the academic and methodological independence of Croatian scientific literary study as an academic field in its own right, which at the beginning of the 1950s

contributed for the first time in the exchange of insights with the wider European scientific literary study circle.

Key words: Immanentism, interpretation, philology, literary historiography, Zagreb School of Literary Study

::1 THE INSTITUTIONAL FORMATION OF CROATIAN SCIENTIFIC LITERARY STUDY

The Zagreb School of Literary Study represents the beginning and peak of the immanentism paradigm in Croatian scientific literary study¹. The initial theoretical impulse was received from Russian formalism; however, it is as much indebted to the 1950s structuralism as well as to post-structuralism and the late 60s and early 70s reception theory. The companions and successors of the first editorial staff of *Umjetnost riječi*, in line with their methodological choices, joined the ranks of cultural studies and both intermedial and intertextual theory during the 1980s. The original name “the Zagreb Stylistic School” suggests preoccupation with stylistic analysis, but the name is only partially justified in that Zdenko Škreb, the founder of the journal, was, in the spirit of Germanic tradition, chiefly responsible for the affirmation of interpretation theory. Aleksandar Flaker, whose versatile efforts in the field of scientific literary study considerably influenced Russian and Slavic studies in Croatia, originally interpreted the principles of Russian formalism and originally contributed to the elaboration of the concept of the avant-garde in scientific literary study. The generation gathered around *Umjetnost riječi* in its first years has usually included (apart from Škreb, Flaker and I. Frangeš) S. Petrović, S. Lasić, M. Beker, V. Žmegač, M. Solar, R. Katičić, K. Pranjić and G. Peleš².

As outlined by D. Oraić Tolić, the institutional history of the Zagreb School can be divided into four developmental points: the foundation of the journal *Umjetnost riječi* and emphasis on stylistic and structuralist analysis, which marked a breakaway from social realism and Marxism; owing to the editorial staff being well informed and their focus on comparative literature, Croatian

¹This article discusses principles of the Zagreb School based on the works of its members or authors who succeeded them at their university posts, or based on the works published in the journal *Umjetnost riječi* (*The Art of the Word*). The article is conceived as “an insider’s look” and an exposition on the self-reflection by the scientists themselves about the literary study paradigm they belong to.

¹D. Oraić Tolić: “Aleksandar Flaker i Zagrebačka škola”. In: *Oko književnosti* (collection of essays). Zagreb 2004, 21–38.

²S. L. Udier: “Jezik književnosti u modernome hrvatskome jezikoslovlju i književnoj znanosti”. *Kolo*, 19(2011) 5–6, pp. 135–177.

scientific literary study for the first time entered the European scientific literary study scene in a timely manner; as a result of exhortations by the members of the Zagreb School, the institutional framework for the functioning of scientific literary study was established: Hrvatsko filološko društvo (Croatian Philological Society), *Umjetnost riječi*, the publications *Uvod u književnost* (Introduction to Literature), *Povijest hrvatske književnosti* (History of Croatian Literature) and *Povijest svjetske književnosti* (History of World Literature) and starting modern language departments and their subsequent spread at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb.

The Zagreb School approach brought novelties to Croatian scientific literary study: in the interpretation of the literary text, it is not justified to ignore language, which should be a starting point of interpretation; scientific literary study is not possible without a systematized terminology; interpretation is a central method of scientific literary study and cannot be identified with the historical-philological method; the Marxist approach generates insufficient results in reading literary works; as is the case with other disciplines, scientific literary study should organize its subject classifying it into a few thematic areas (*Uvod u književnost* is one such attempt at organization). The relationship between literature and language is a key issue in the description of the Zagreb School method. This relationship is manifested in the works by the members of the School in three ways³: as a belief in the purity and objectivity of the literary work and its language in relation to the reader; the relativization of the work in favor of the recipient by emphasizing the impossibility for language, from a linguistic point of view, to encompass the peculiarities of a literary work of art; the actualization of the dynamic relationship between the work and the recipient, where both sides refer to each other. In the first years of *Umjetnost riječi*, works with a strong structuralist component of diverse provenance (Russian formalism, Czech structuralism, American new criticism, German phenomenology) are prevalent.

In the middle of the 20th century, on the eve of the launch of *Umjetnost riječi*, structuralism and semiotics dominate European scientific literary study and reception theory begins its breakthrough⁴. Through Russian formalists' efforts scientific literary study managed to specify its subject and differentiate it from other humanistic disciplines. The Zagreb scientific literary study circle, gathered around *Umjetnost riječi*, stood united on the focus on the text principle and re-evaluation of methodological starting points and literary procedures. Defining terminology and literary study metalanguage, which

³J. Užarević: "Umjetnost riječi: književnost i jezik". UR, 30(1986) 4, pp. 289-321.

⁴Id.: "Znanost o književnosti i teorija interpretacije". In: *Između tropa i priče*. Zagreb 2002, 113-134.

was the primary task undertaken by the Zagreb School, proved to be a deeply contentious issue among scholars. Somewhat limited achievements of those efforts are most evident in the interpretation crisis period at the end of the 1960s, when Škreb's ideal of the so-called total interpretation (which deals with separate works by the same author, presents all relevant philological and literary historical data and tries to set each work in the broadest context of world literature of the corresponding epoch) is seriously undermined.

Umjetnost riječi was preceded by the academic journal *Pogledi* (Views, Zagreb 1952-55), subtitled "the journal for the theory of humanities and natural sciences", conceived as an independent platform for teachers and professors of the Marxist orientation. Its editor-in-chief was Rudi Supek (1913-1993; later editor of *Praxis* 1967-73). The journal published a great number of articles on literature and its last issue was entirely dedicated to literary theory and history as well as to their related disciplines (folkloristics and stylistics, particularly articles by Maja Bošković Stulli i P. Guberina). After *Pogledi*, where both Frangeš and Flaker were literary editors, was discontinued, an opportunity to launch an independent publication dedicated to literary history arose. "Umjetnost riječi sve rane liječi"⁵ ("The art of the word heals all wounds") was a slogan used by Škreb, Frangeš and Flaker, the founders and editors of *Umjetnost riječi*, a quarterly subtitled "the journal for scientific literary study" (from 1957). In *Autotopografija* (Autotopography) Flaker testifies to the first editorial arrangements agreed to by the founders, who at first defined two fundamental goals of the journal: to inform the Croatian public about current insights in foreign scientific literary study and to publish as many interpretations of separate literary works as possible.

Irrespective of the differences in interpretation between Frangeš and Škreb in the first years of the journal, there was one issue over which consensus existed: a change of method. In the period when the journal was launched, the state of Croatian academic literature and methodology is described by Flaker⁶ as a combination of pseudopositivism along the lines of A. Barca's insights into the national literature ("the size of the small ones") and pseudo-Marxism, which literally interpreted literary works as "a reflection of reality". Led from his academic beginnings to the research of Croatian-Russian literary connections, Flaker, as he states⁷, committed himself to comparative literary study; more specifically, to the research on the similarities between Croatian short story writers and I. S. Turgenev. Sceptical towards interpretation, Flaker

⁵A. Flaker: *Autotopografija*, II. Zagreb 2010, pp. 29-31.

⁶"Promjena metode", In: *Ibid.*, pp. 50-57.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 51

in his youth already realized that however meticulous Einzelinterpretation (interpretation of separate texts) was, without putting it into the historical context, it was incomplete⁸. Owing to a fruitful collaboration primarily with Škreb, in the first year already the editorial staff advanced a few theses which would govern their later works irrespective of their first purpose, the editorial one: the literary text is at the center of scientific literary study; a literary text should not be taken out of the context of the time in which it was written nor out of historical sequence; each and every literary text, however immaterial it is deemed in historical sequence, is worthy of the scientific approach.

In this early period when the postulates governing the editorial policy of the journal were still being defined, Flaker's position was somewhat specific: he was among the first Croatian scholars to undertake comparative research projects. Convinced that the comparative method ideally united the immanent and literary historical approach, he was determined to define "the middle way" as exactly as possible as the appropriate methodology: in his book *Stilovi i razdoblja*⁹ (The Styles and Periods) he published the study "Formalna metoda" i njezina sudbina ("The Formal Method" and Its Destiny, previously published in *Pogledi* 55, 1955). The formalist doctrine¹⁰ provided Flaker with a starting point for "the change of method": formalism introduced important novelties in literary criticism, which even decades after the zenith of the formalist method the Croatian milieu was not familiar enough with. An interest in the so-called craft of poetry, emphasis on the autonomy of the literary work, delivering scientific literary study from subordination to other academic disciplines, primarily history, emphasis on the procedure as the central subject of research and perceiving the history of literature as a process of literary styles being deposed one after another – these guidelines are Flaker's selection from the legacy of Futurism¹¹, where the thesis about the autonomy of the literary work which disregards the literary historical context is unequivocally rejected: only literary history has the possibility to form synthesis, for which Flaker, as is evident from his later works, cared the most.

For the synthetic presentation of literary works in their literary historical sequence, Croatian scientific literary study until the 1950s was not adequately

⁸Ibid., p. 54

⁹A. Flaker and Z. Škreb, Zagreb 1964.

¹⁰Although its influence already diminished at the end of the 1920s, Russian formalism was present in Croatia in the 1950s through most of the works of its members, becoming synonymous with the objective approach to a literary work which did not include its evaluation. I. Vidan comments on the trend of "borrowing" from formalism and also on the trendy rejection of formalism in his review of the book *Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism* Ewe M. Thompson (1971): UR, 17(1973) 1, pp. 67–71.

¹¹M. Šicel, "Aleksandar Flaker, Izabrana djela", PSHK, vol. 157/I, pp. 7–21.

equipped in terms of terminology and made use of imprecise concepts of literary movement, school and course. The concept of *Umjetnost riječi*, although the journal was not polemical in its character, was opposed to both the strict philological approach to a literary work and to sociological methods, which are not suitable for literature and the results of which are valid only in a particular political moment. In order to bridge the terminological gap left after the gradual departure from philological positivism and created by the imposed anticipation of Marxist vocabulary, the editorial staff found in foreign philologies universally accepted solutions applicable to the Croatian national literature, which would, in such a broadened perspective, ride the same wave as the so-called great Western European literatures.

An illustrative example of such methodological and terminological transposition, benefiting Croatian scholarship and national literature, is Flaker's treatment of the concept of the avant-garde: he set up a precise timeframe this concept referred to (so that it no longer applied to any preceding literature), switched focus in reconstructing avant-garde poetics from manifestos and program texts (which abounded in the avant-garde more than in any other literary formation) to literary texts whose primary function was even in the original context of their emergence aesthetic rather than programmatic. Proceeding from his concept of optimal projection as the key determinant of the avant-garde structure, in the context of interwar Croatian literature he emphasized the hitherto insufficiently articulated connection between avant-garde literature, its conception of the so-called engaged literature and the political left¹².

Two factors were important for *Umjetnost riječi* to become situated in the Zagreb academic scene in the middle of the 1950s, the broad or social one and the narrow or literary critical one: in the restricted conditions of socio-political reality, social realism and its criticism did not encourage ties with foreign authors and theories; consequently, stylistic criticism was not advocated. *Umjetnost riječi* questioned methodological functionality in amassing of material and biographism¹³ and promoted "philological cosmopolitanism"¹⁴, which was the foundation of the four most important scientific literary study works of that period (*Mimesis* by E. Auerbach, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* by E. R. Curtius, *Basic Concepts of Poetics* by E. Staiger and *The Linguistic Work of Art* by W. Kayser). These works advocate the conception of the so-called world literature; in other words, national boundaries

¹²Ibid., p. 18

¹³V. Žmegač, "Pedesetogodišnjica "Umjetnosti riječi", UR, 50(2006) 2-3, pp. 127-132.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 130

are not emphasized. Thus, *Umjetnost riječ* became the first Croatian scholarly journal from the field of literature which was not primarily interested in the extraliterary aspects of life and authorship of literary authors and it anticipated the communication model of literary authorship (author – work – reader), in which the author is a virtual category.

::2 FOR AND AGAINST INTERPRETATION

The basic proposition of the pro interpretation view is that the literary work is a linguistic work of art, and literature “the art of the word”. This proposition facilitates the formulation of the rules for the scientific, analytical interpretation of a literary work, the rules which would not be primarily preoccupied with meanings but procedures in the text, which would indirectly outline the methodological standard of scientific literary study altogether. The closest to this proposition came Frangeš, who assimilated and then transformed L. Spitzer’s method, rejecting each and every time to begin with the same assumptions and to ask the same questions¹⁵.

In a critique of Škreb’s study *Književnost i povijesni svijet* (Literature and the Historical World, Zagreb 1981), which discusses small literary forms, terminological disputes and the phenomenon of trivial literature, V. Biti¹⁶ draws attention to the fact that Škreb’s views “limit understanding” since they are formulated as an incontestable analytical starting point. Undoubtedly, that disproves the promoted ideal of “scientificity” and the denial of subjectivity, omitting to emphasize that the scholar himself is socially and historically conditioned. (Biti interprets the main tasks of scientific literary study commenting¹⁷ on J. Užarević’s study “Umjetnost riječi: književnost i jezik”¹⁸ (The Art of the Word: Literature and Language): the task of scientific literary study should not be looking for prescriptions and devices but rather looking for an answer to the question why and how language and literature defy all explanation, just as the perception of the world defies their explanations. These two issues are not only the subject of the theory, but define its cognitive interest.)

A short comparison of the first three editions of *Uvod u književnost* (The Introduction into Literature, 1961, 1969 and 1983) suffices to follow Škreb’s gradual abandonment of interpretation as the central method of scientific

¹⁵B. Donat: “Načela tzv. škole zagrebačke stilističke kritike”. *Kritika*, 1(1968) 3, pp. 254-268. Donat is most critical towards the interpretations in the first issues of the *Umjetnost riječi*, labeling them “short-sighted”.

¹⁶“Aporije objektivnog pristupa”. In: *Pripitomljavanje drugog*. Zagreb 1989, pp. 33-36.

¹⁷“Čega nema, tog se ne odreci”. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-93.

¹⁸UR, 30(1986) 4, pp. 289-322.

literary study¹⁹. The first edition had four tasks: to present the latest theoretical advances in scientific literary study, to allow for the detachment from Marxist criticism, to establish unambiguous terminology and to exemplify one's own method with exhaustive interpretation of the canonical texts of Croatian literature. The interpretation part is omitted in the second edition, while in the third one interpretation loses the status of an independent field in scientific literary study.

The status of interpretation can also be seen in the case of the concepts of style and stylistics in *Umjetnost riječi*²⁰: in the first issues a large number of linguo-stylistic and stylistics works are present, and, as it was gradually becoming evident that contribution to the concept of style was felt only on the level of reading separate texts as opposed to the level of theory, putting interpretation theory and practice at the heart of the problem put an end to the attempt to establish style as a category in scientific literary study, the category which would unambiguously justify the (formalistic) view that the *differentia specifica* of literature lies in the sphere of language and style respectively.

::3 BETWEEN THE SYSTEM AND HISTORICITY²¹

V. Biti²² links the birth of scientific literary study with a rise in interest about comparative study of literature. In German-speaking lands a shift away from positivist philology and historical hermeneutics is considered the beginning of scientific literary study. Even today Germanists regard philological preparatory work as a necessary introduction to the theoretical study of literature. Behind this shift from hermeneutics towards interpretation lies the name of E. Staiger, whose influence had been present until the end of the 1960s, when scientism of interpretation met resistance and when interest in social and historical dimensions of literature was revived. English study of literature is specific in that as opposed to the rest of European philologies it has traditionally resisted literary study specialization, and its subject is oriented at the national literary canon and the preservation of the importance and status of English culture as a whole. In the 1930s, when the originally American practice of the so-called "close reading" became widely accepted,

¹⁹A. Kalinski: "Metodološki pristup Zdenka Škreba". UR, 48(2004) 2-4, pp. 119-129.

²⁰Lj. Srhoj-Čerina: "Stil i stilistika na stranicama Umjetnosti riječi". Glasje, 1(1994) 1, pp. 21-32.

²¹A. Stamač titled his foreword to the 4th edition of *Uvod u književnost* "Znanost o književnosti između sustava i povijesnosti" (Literary Study between the System and Historicity), which was also printed in UR, 30(1986) 2, pp. 171-176.

²²V. Biti: "Znanost o književnosti. Uvod u genezu i stanje pojma". UR, 41(1997) 1-2, pp. 1-19. The article is identical to the entry in *Pojmovnik suvremene književne teorije*.

literary study broke free from the imperative of evaluating literary works and from the constraint to emphasize the size of any given author or work. The new criticism method is responsible for the separation of the reading and interpretation of the work from the reconstruction of the author's intentions. In this way literary study defined its subject, independent of other humanistic disciplines. However, even the close reading method is not focused on text only, nor is it impartial in its description. The scientificity of the method is a result of the scientification of the impressionistic vocabulary of literary criticism at the turn of the century. Just as interpretation replaced literary history, so theory has been gradually replacing interpretation since the 1970s. Thus, the three traditional components of scientific literary study – theory, criticism and history – do not exclude one another but are interactively repositioned according to the dominant component. Owing to the interdisciplinary approach at US universities, where literary theory is inextricably intertwined with psychoanalysis, philosophy, anthropology, sociology and cultural history, literary theory functions as a separate, self-referential genre, exemplified by N. Luhmann's "suprtheory", which sees theory as being self-sufficient for its own definition, describing categories in which it can be recognized and reassessing itself through the views of other fields, all of which contributes to the polycontextuality of its description and the relativity of its categories.

Although post-structuralism²³ finds the relationship between the signifier and the signified (which lies at the foundation of the perception of literature as a sign system) questionable, part of the structuralist approach which opposes the intention of evaluating the literary text and without any restriction introduces into the reading of literature concepts and propositions from other areas has remained intact. The irrelevancy of evaluation in scientific literary study is manifested by the unflagging interest in trivial literature (which is identical to the greatest masterpieces in terms of the characteristics of its structure).

A. Stamać indirectly depicts the state of Croatian scientific literary study just before the fourth edition of *Uvod u književnost*: 1. terminological disputes are not resolved in any way whatsoever (as an aid, the manual for the first time contains the index of names); 2. the arrangement of chapters directly determines the order in which scientific literary study issues should be put forward (bearing in mind that this very order is one of the main unresolved issues of modern literary study); 3. in the first chapter, *Znanost o književnosti* (Scientific Literary Study), the focus is on the issue of the validity of the method of literary history (which is manifested twofold: as the history of literary works

²³M. Beker: "Od strukturalizma do dekonstrukcije". UR, 32(1988) 1, pp. 7-32. Speaking of post-structuralism, Beker focuses on deconstruction and its "dismantling" among structuralists, particularly Todorov.

and as history *in* literature); 4. the importance of stylistics is narrowed down to the study of the functional usage of language and individual cases of such usage; 5. beside, and in addition to the regularly present oral literature, the microstructure of language and style, tropes and figures, the theory of narration (under the title *Umjetnička proza* (The Artistic Prose)) and the traditional genre division require special chapters; 6. the chapter *Interpretacija* (Interpretation) comes down to the proposal of a possible approach to the literary text; 7. the chapter *Književni sustavi i književni pokreti* (Literary Systems and Literary Movements), an overview of poetics in historical sequence, is actually a summary of different schools in literary research.

The influence of Škreb's approach is somewhat apparent: interest in the generic, immanent conventions of the literary text (which he sought in small and trivial forms) and the so-called ergocentrism²⁴. In opposition towards the positivist tradition, in his *Studij književnosti* (A Study of Literature) Škreb decidedly rejects the orientation towards the author's life, the interpretation of their psyche and personal experiences and linking them together with the literary text. The ergocentric approach is actually an immanent analysis which includes interest in the basic theoretical issues, continuing to make use of historical materialism devices. The significance of the shift inaugurated in *Umjetnost riječi* does not lie in the infallible methodological or terminological consistency, but rather in the fact that in that period, the beginning of the 1950s, this shift introduced articulated and elaborated innovation into Croatian literary history and comparative literary study, determining their subsequent course. On the one hand, this course entails a literary historical study of the national literature; on the other hand, it entails a comparative study, which connects the national literature with foreign literatures, that is, with the so-called world literature. Although both of these studies are not conceived by the Zagreb School differently either in terms of methods or in terms of results, the above-mentioned shift introduced by *Umjetnost riječi*, specifically thematizing even the general issues of literature, taught the comparative approach to be so implicit as to make the possibility of a stable development of comparative literature study as a separate discipline with its autonomous method questionable²⁵.

Škreb's view on the historicity of the scientific literary study method is evident from his reference to Jauss, who thinks that, in order to bridge the gap between the aesthetic and historical point of view, literary historians have to detach themselves from describing the process of general history as reflected

²⁴V. Žmegač: "Književna povijest i teorija u Zdenka Škreba". UR, 48(2004) 2-4, pp. 89-96.

²⁵A. Flaker: "Komparatistika ili znanost o književnosti?", UR, 20(1976) 3, p. 355

in literary works and instead have to try to identify the thread of the literary historical process which would also incorporate its general social component²⁶. The collection of essays *Hrvatska književnost u evropskom kontekstu* (Croatian Literature in the European context, Zagreb 1978), in which the positivist orientation is abandoned and biographies and historical circumstances are presented strictly in order to portray the literary fact²⁷, stands out with its literary historical importance.

Literary diachrony can be approached in three ways²⁸: as a description of different systems of poetics replacing one another in succession, an institutionalized development of literature and changes in its supra-individual norms (modes and genres). In this approach individual biographies are not taken into consideration, and only those literary works which are the carriers of transmissive, transsubjective traits are analyzed. The second approach, which relies on a description of the general historical circumstances accompanying literary history, also abandons the monographic approach and focuses instead on those characteristics of the literature of a particular period which are socially determined or on those types of poetics which are recognizably sociocentric. Such approach is that of new historicism, a representative movement in literary historiography. The third possibility is the reception of literature, directed at the recipient, at the study of mentality, while a particularly propulsive movement in that field seems to be imagology, a description of literary images of foreign peoples²⁹. Barthes similarly conceives his historical ontology, which deals with the history of ideas which in literature have had considerable supra-individual importance (among those is the idea about the autonomy of literature, which is also characterized by parallel general historical processes and is part of the typical mentality of the civilization phase of the 20th century European humanist thought).

The social determinacy of the literary work is the most thorough in oral literature. In authorial works, layers of the social context the author belongs to are skewed as a result of the author's particular and partial view³⁰.

²⁶Z. Škreb: "Nov pogled na metodologiju povijesti književnosti". UR, 17(1973) 1, p. 24

²⁷A. Stamać: "Znanost o književnosti danas u Hrvatskoj", UR, 23(1979) 4, pp. 283-288.

²⁸V. Žmegač: "Dileme povijesne projekcije književnosti". In: *Oko književnosti* (collection of essays). Zagreb 2004, 51-63.

²⁹Z. Konstantinović: "Od imagologije do istraživanja mentaliteta". UR, 30(1986) 2, pp. 137-142. The author reports on the development of imagology within French comparative literary study, connects literary anthropological research with Jaus's shift towards reception and analyzes M. Foucault and his literary "archaeology" as an excellent example of a literary theoretical incursion into the obsolete structures of collective consciousness which harbor complex myths, ideologies and utopias, with which the author necessarily corresponds as with his authentic context, which is invariably inscribed in the literary work.

³⁰V. Biti: "Recepcija semiotike u radovima zagrebačke znanosti o književnosti". UR, 34(1990) 1, pp. 117-127. Biti

4 A METHODOLOGICAL LEGACY

Owing to the imperfect results of interpretation, that is, to its individual realizations in which it is impossible to avoid arbitrariness, contingency, subjectivity and purposeless ahistoricity, the Zagreb School in its mature phase adopted a conciliatory approach: every literary work should be incorporated into literary tradition and have its properties and stylistic characteristics described in detail as to the genre and mode it belongs to; in this manner the description of the structure of the literary work and its ties with the stylistic formation in which it emerged can be functionally linked.

In the period of the invasion of the newspeak of speculative literary theory³¹ in the mid 1990s, P. Jirsak warns about an important controversy within scientific literary study: a large part of its terminology was created by the self-endeavour of its subject, but not with the aim to be used in the metatextual scientific literary study method. In spite of the efforts, few concepts in scientific literary study have semantic coherence stable enough to be unambiguous in all contexts. Semantic coherence, according to a suggestion by A. Stamać, is ensured by the following: a metalanguage empiricism, scientificity of style, logicity, terminological systematization³². Although Stamać tries to define precisely each of these conditions, he concludes that the terminology of scientific literary study is an amalgamated system in which concepts from different disciplines are combined³³.

Notwithstanding doubts, the historical study of literature is still one of the most important fields within scientific literary study. The legacy of former positivism is visible here and there in variously conceived sociological approaches, which in fact are left with no choice but to return again to biographies, literary programs and socio-political circumstances. The literary work is at

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analyzes, using *Studij književnosti*, Škreb's contempt for the reconstruction of the author's intention and Škreb's aspiration towards synchronic description, the creation of space for diachrony in *Oblik i smisao* by S. Petrović, *Književno stvaralaštvo i povijest društva* by V. Žmegač, whom he highlights as the typical representative of the Zagreb School, *Uvod u filozofiju književnost* by M. Solar and *Stilske formacije* by A. Flaker, by Biti's admittance the only one to interpret the literary text in terms of its inner structure, criticizing the members of the Zagreb School for an inclination to deny the literary structure having its function, which is always dependent on some historical conditioning and extraliterary horizon (p. 124).

³¹P. Jirsak: "Načela književnoznanstvenoga nazivlja zagrebačke škole i praško iskustvo". UR, 39(1995) 3-4, p. 187

³²A. Stamać: "Jezik znanosti o književnosti", UR, 28(1984) 3, p. 250

³³Although the above-mentioned conditions of "scientificity" basically cannot be refuted, the belief in the so-called zero degree of writing (the so-called expert writing style from the pragmatic point of view) does not seem justified. Not even in the most consistent examples of immanentism, as Škreb's interpretations are, nor in Stamać's conceptually overabundant discourse, where there is no elimination of the author nor is the author's attitude towards the subject invisible. An insistence on the impersonal subject may in addition seem as a simulation of exactitude in scientific literary study.

the center of every scientific approach to literature, but (as Flaker foresaw³⁴) only as one of many parts of a broad cultural history of a particular period or cultural circle. The historical commentary on the literary work, when at the center of its interest are the writer's biography and the context of his writing, can have practical significance, if it already does not boast any other values. Nevertheless, as in scientific literary study nothing can be determined a priori, so not every biographism is necessarily positivism, just as not every analysis of the style of the literary work is by virtue of the choice of its subject "more scientific" than the description of realities not immanent to the text, as the writer's biography is.

No field of scientific literary study can (nor it should) follow the methods of the natural sciences, which gave the initial impetus to the philological positivism of 19th century literary history. The need for scientific literary study to emancipate itself, articulated in Russian formalism, ended in a paradox: the result of radical antipositivism was radical empirism, nothing other than the other side of the positivist medal³⁵. Although nominally antipositivist, even contemporary literary study refers to the achieved exactitude of its methods and considers the description of the abstract rules of the literary process to be its main task, deluding itself with the 19th century "scientificity" ideal.

::5 A METHODOLOGICAL AWARENESS CRISIS

The status of the umbrella terms, such as the modern modernism, the avant-garde, the postmodern, postmodernism³⁶ is still being discussed in Croatian scientific literary study. Since "postmodern" literary study is based on the idea of plurality, the domination of the media culture, a large number of different theoretical systems, methods and identities, as literature itself is, its study is characterized by two phenomena: mistification (by concealing identity) and autobiography (by revealing identity), so that in this context both literary study theories and terms are merely stories, that is, myths³⁷.

Scientific literary study as a scientific discipline *sensu stricto* lacks a unique method³⁸. The ahistoric formalistic approaches advocated at European and US modern language departments in the 1960s are becoming less popular among

³⁴A. Flaker: "Poredbena književnost i povijest književnosti". UR, 20(1976) 3, p. 347-349.

³⁵S. Petrović: "Prevladavanje antipozitivističke pobune". UR, 14(1970) 1-2, pp. 181-187.

³⁶D. Oraić Tolić: Kraj stoljeća. Mit i književnoznanstveni termin. UR, 43(1999) 3-4, p. 199-210.

³⁷Ibid., p. 209

³⁸Speaking of comparative literary study as a separate discipline in scientific literary study, the crisis of the method and its consequences are described by M. Beker: "Je li komparativna književnost u krizi?" UR, 42(1998) 2, pp. 91-100.

literary researchers. Russian formalism and its influence on structuralism, among many choices of critical reflection, can be reassessed in the following manner: from the assumption that the structuralist thesis that language is a system with its own rules³⁹ is not questioned, it follows that everything which possesses its own rules is autonomous, and everything which is autonomous is closed and removed in relation to all those things which are not part of the system. Although the most purposeful and fruitful structuralist theses (one of which is the self-reference of poetic language) are derived from these seemingly evident propositions, it is evident, to put it simply, that language is not a closed system and that it is directly dependent on the contextual usage⁴⁰.

M. Beker in a critique of Peter Washington's *Fraud: Literary Theory and the End of English* (London 1989) outlines in detail Washington's theses and his original critical commentaries which testify to his view on the state of literary study. With the aim to dispute the methods of literary theory and scientific literary study and its structuralist foundations, the whole "structuralist project" is questioned because it neglects the fact that literature is not only a symbolic code but a phenomenon which develops historically⁴¹. After it was adopted in the 1960s from linguistics, where it had at the time already gained the status of the conventional method, structuralism, i.e. the structuralist linguistics method, has produced results in the description of metrics and versification, ergo improving specialist knowledge, especially in the area of verse study, but without the possibility of solving general literary issues⁴².

In recent Croatian scientific literary study works, the tendency of immanentism is still recognizable, however, the so-called cultural interpretation (as part of cultural studies or literary anthropology) is dominant there⁴³. The formalistic approach is the most adopted one until the end of the 1980s, when scientific literary study categories bring history and historicity back (via new historicism and cultural materialism). Immanentism as a methodological legacy is not completely overcome considering that every interest in style entails the reception method which primarily studies text, not its background. In scientific literary study, the idea about an objective insight is replaced with the realiza-

³⁹M. Beker: "Kriza poststrukturalizma, kriza teorije?", UR, 34(1990) 4, p. 357

⁴⁰Beker, commenting on Raymond Tallis, endorses the view that language as a system cannot be defined independently of reference, that is, extralinguistic reality (*Not Saussure*, London 1988).

⁴¹Washington's work and Beker's critique indicate to what extent the Croatian milieu was aware of the growing weariness resulting from an excess of theory and the "scientificity" of literary research, which is a very important step in the observation of the changes in the approach to literature from the first issues of *Umjetnost riječi* until the end of the 1980s.

⁴²R. Katičić: "Lingvistički strukturalizam i proučavanje književnosti". UR, 15(1971) 3, pp. 177-181.

⁴³L. Rafolt: "Zabilješke o jednome poglavlju suvremene hrvatske znanosti o književnosti: nove tendencije i nove paradigme". In: *Jezik književnosti i književni ideologemi* (collection of essays). Zagreb 2007, 137-169.

tion that an unambiguous representation of literary history is impossible⁴⁴.

The chronological synthesization of the national literature during the second half of the 20th century gradually lost its scientific legitimacy, failing to demarcate its subject from that of cultural and general history. As a result, literary history has become an author catalog, which classifies literary material into compartments, connected only by facts from general history⁴⁵. One should be able to both historically situate and interpret literary facts in terms of extraliterary circumstances, which does not mean that literature is an illustration of general history. The evolutionary principle of development does not apply to literature nor is there a development course which would be immanent to literature. The constituent layer represents the relationship with the tradition every literary work belongs to (whether it imitates or disputes the tradition), and the awareness about this layer is already a literary historical reconstruction. An insistence on the description of this layer is not sociological determinism⁴⁶, but the commentary which in its own right will become part of the same literary history as the subject it describes and serve future readers for the reconstruction of the corresponding period. And so forth indefinitely.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 164

⁴⁵V. Žmegač: "Problem književne povijesti". UR, 23(1979) 1, p. 9

⁴⁶Id.: "Spoznajni interes historiografije književnosti". UR, 24(1980) 2, pp. 77-84.

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